

Memorandum

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To: DEPUTY DISTRICT DIRECTORS
Environmental and Planning
DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL BRANCH CHIEFS
DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL SENIORS

Date: January 20, 2006

From: JAY NORVELL
Chief
Division of Environmental Analysis



Subject: Advanced Mitigation Planning Project – The Next Step of Gathering, Sharing, and Disseminating District Information and Ideas

As discussed at the last Environmental Manager's Board Meeting, the Department has contracted with UC Davis' Information Center for the Environment (ICE), to work with the Districts and the Division to take the next step in advanced mitigation delivery options by facilitating mitigation needs assessments and developing new methods to improve our ability to do long-range planning for mitigation needs. A summary of the project components is attached for your reference.

This project represents a watershed opportunity for Districts and the Department as a whole to look inward, on their own terms, gather information and have it analyzed to help us make long-range mitigation planning a reality in the near term. As the work progresses, the scope will be adjusted to assure that sharing of innovation and knowledge is maximized from district to district as well as cubicle to cubicle. Initial feedback from North Region has already resulted in some early findings that will help us provide the districts with immediate benefits from the project such as how to make historic information easily available.

In order to accomplish the project goals, UC Davis staff will need your assistance to point them to data on planned transportation projects, constructed mitigation projects and GIS mapping that can be used for long-range mitigation planning. The detailed knowledge and insight of your biologists and planners will be essential to advancing new approaches and options that can be used by project teams statewide. We have scheduled

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UC Davis staff to visit districts between now and approximately the end of March for this purpose. Please note that we will make every effort to recognize your scheduling constraints and make the visits a two-way exchange that will help offset time expended on this effort.

Veda Lewis, our Mitigation Coordinator under Gregg Erickson, Chief, Office of Biological Studies, will be in contact with your staff to determine the appropriate contacts for the research. She is also your contact for any questions regarding the Advanced Mitigation Planning Project. Contact Ms. Lewis at (916) 653-7946 or Mr. Erickson at (916) 654-6296, if you have any questions.

Attachment

ADVANCED MITIGATION PLANNING PROJECT

1. Long-range Mitigation Plans and Analysis

- Using state-of-art GIS analysis and conservation planning principles develop long-range (10-year) mitigation needs summaries and biological mitigation plans for each District/Region. At least two (2) pilot Districts (or areas) will be selected by Caltrans HQ Environmental staff for intensive modeling. Elkhorn Slough will be the first pilot; the second is still to be determined.
- The report will include a cost-benefit analysis of in-house Caltrans biological map development (land cover and habitat classification data) and will develop a recommended process for ongoing data analysis and strategic mitigation planning.

The long-range mitigation plans will include model wetland mitigation and conservation bank agreements and programmatic agreements for multiple Caltrans projects that affect a habitat or species across District and Region boundaries.

2. A Mitigation Project Study

- Investigate and analyze a variety of past Caltrans mitigation projects to describe approaches used, evaluate outcomes and compare to costs, and summarize lessons learned. The analysis will include at least four (4) projects from each District (from at least the past 10 years) that range from Minor to Capital and include a wide variety of species and habitats and mitigation strategies. Existing programmatic agreements and wetland mitigation or conservation banks currently available to Caltrans will be catalogued and analyzed.

3. Updating and adding records to the existing Caltrans BioMitigation database.

- The existing database will have some adjustments and it will be expanded to include data on approximately 30 transportation projects from each district. The new records will include information from a variety of capital and minor District projects involving a wide spectrum of species and habitats. Associated mitigation project documents will also be uploaded and linked, for example Biological Opinions, Monitoring Plans, and Mitigation and Monitoring Reports.